

GRIEF AND LOSS

This time of year often brings many plans with hopes of renewing family memories and relationships. Frequently, children are both excited and saddened by these events. The excitement, of course, comes from opportunities to visit with relatives and friends. The sadness can come as thoughts drift to those who are not there. It is in this sadness that thoughts can linger and lead to distractions that intrude into the joys of everyday life. Often, adults hesitate to talk with children for fear of bringing up difficult feelings. There are many suggestions from organizations who help facilitate children's grief. I have summarized these ideas for you to consider. If you would like more information or think your family would benefit from working more closely with these agencies, I invite you to contact me.

WHAT IS LOSS?

The Obvious Losses

Death

Divorce

Moving

The Not-So-Obvious Losses

Changing schools of goals	Changing teachers	Loss of opportunity	Loss
Loss of trust of comfort	Loss of hope	Loss of respect	Loss
Loss of friendship pet	Robbery	Loss of status-i.e.new sibling	Death of a
Loss of communication health	Anticipatory Grief	Family economic changes	Loss of
Loss of security future plan	Loss of self-esteem	Loss of routine	Loss of

Mini Losses – Cumulative Everyday Losses

Cancelled game	Lost homework	Loss of recess	Lost lunch money
Missed bus	Pimples	Loss of clothing	Lower grade than expected

COMMON FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH GRIEF

Denial – *“This can’t be happening.” “I don’t want to talk/think about it.” “What’s going to happen to me?”*

Children may become hyperactive, an over achiever, refuse to have fun, exhibit fear, blame

others, become resentful, irritable, or have difficulty sleeping.

Anger – *“Why me?” “I don’t ever want to see him again!” “I hate you!” “Leave me alone!”*

Children may lash out at those who are involved in the situation or less powerful than them, blame others, become resentful, irritable, or have difficulty sleeping, and/or may think no one loves them.

Bargaining – *“If I do the best I can then it won’t be true or might be reversible.”*

Children may try to make a deal as a form of manipulating an unpleasant reality, do anything

for attention, overeat or refuse to eat, become talkative or refuse to talk.

Sadness – *“They don’t care about me.” “I’m dumb.” “Why try?”*

This occurs as children realize they do not control or have a measurable impact on the loss.

Children may engage in self-blame, feel worthless, regress into immature behaviors, become

passive, withdrawn, and/or feel guilty.

Acceptance – *“I don’t like it, but this is the way it is.” “What can I do to make the best of it?”*

Children may feel a sense of relief, assume more responsibility for their feelings and behaviors

and begin to trust again. No one forgets the lost person or relationship, nor the hurt, but no

longer feels angry, sad, or preoccupied with the loss.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW LOVED ONES CAN HELP

1. Teach children to appreciate qualities about themselves in terms of who they are, not by what they have.
2. Encourage children to continue to love even when those they love die or leave them.
3. Recognize that children may hesitate to initiate new relationships, for fear that they cannot love the person they have lost *and* a new person, or for fear that they will leave too.
4. Teach your child that loss is a natural part of living.
5. Know that inappropriate behavior such as lying, stealing, and decreased academic performance are symptoms of underlying needs. Gentle, firm, consistent rules still apply.
6. There is no universal time for grief. Be an example for your child to take time to heal.
7. Too-soon substitutes for the lost person or object can impede the grief process.
8. Help your child develop new behaviors in dealing with loss before the next one occurs.
9. Recognize that experiencing loss is a significant step toward growth.
10. Help your child establish or re-establish beliefs and goals.
11. Encourage your child to share his/her feelings and thoughts. *You don’t have to have the answers!*
12. Help your child understand that feelings of anger, frustration, guilt, and sadness are normal and they can still be responsible for their behavior.
13. Don’t allow feelings to be denied, covered up (to *‘be strong’*) for this hinders the grief process.
14. Give your child as much information as you can about changes that will occur in his/her life, especially when there is divorce or re-marriage. This helps re-establish predictability.
15. Share with your child what you as a person are going through when you experience death, divorce, or re-marriage. Children will feel comforted and not alone in their grief.
16. Read books on divorce, death, and/or step-families, with your children. Talk about it.
17. Help your children identify all of the positive things that have resulted in their loss, especially in the case of divorce or re-marriage.
18. Teach your children that they don’t cause adult problems. A down-side to thinking the world revolves around them!

19. When children are faced with deep and painful feelings, physical touching (hugs, pats) can be very comforting.
20. Help your children realize that there is an end to each loss situation and that it will pass.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR ME AND MY CHILD?

*For a list of local resources, please see your school counselor.

BRIDGES – A Center for Grieving Children, affiliated with Mary Bridge
253-272-8266

Children Grieve, Too – Renton www.allkidsgrieve.org 425-226-1253

Compassionate Friends – surviving your child’s suicide www.compassionatefriends.org 877-969-0010

The Dougy Center - The National Center for Grieving Children and Families www.dougy.org

Divorce Lifeline – Free Orientation/Information 800-509-0515

Families and Friends of Violent Crime Victims www.fnfvcv.org
800-346-7555

Sources:

Bebensee, B. Perspectives on Loss

McEntee, P. Franciscan Hospice

Oaklander, V. Windows to Our Children

S.O.S. – Survivors of Suicide
BRIDGES

Violent Crime Victim Services

Divorce Lifeline

By Deanne Cousins